

## FAQ'S (Frequently Asked Questions)

**Q. How will the Sacramento River Conservation Area affect public access?**

**A. The SRCA does not advocate a change in public use along the Sacramento River. The overall goal of the SRCA is to “preserve remaining riparian habitat and reestablish a continuous riparian ecosystem along the Sacramento River between Redding and Chico, and reestablish riparian vegetation along the river from Chico to Verona”. The wording within the Handbook recognizes that “the entire river ecosystem and the humans within it”, includes a multitude of uses including: agriculture, recreation, and habitat for wildlife. We understand that with more public land ownership, there must be a public benefit derived from the expenditure of public funds. The definition of the public benefit will be determined by the respective land holding agencies through a management planning process that includes very extensive public input. The agency may determine that the greatest public benefit to specific properties is best accomplished by excluding or limiting public access, or they may decide that extensive recreational enjoyment may be the best public use. The SRCA will help provide a forum for that discussion and insure that all sectors are informed of opportunities for comment.**

**Q. If I own land in the Conservation Area, how does the Sacramento River Conservation Area program affect the use of my land?**

**A. Because the SRCA is not a governmental agency, and has no regulatory powers, the programs and actions that may be available to you are voluntary. The designation of a Conservation Area just recognizes that natural activities within the river corridor impact what is going on nearby (flooding, seepage, human & wildlife use)---and, that activities nearby may affect the ecological processes occurring within the river corridor (urban development, flood control & land leveling). The Inner River Zone (IRZ) is a narrow corridor within the Conservation Area where active river meander and frequent flooding occur. This limited river meander area is recognized as being important for many sensitive wildlife species and the habitat needed for their continued health. The SRCA and its participating agencies and organizations use incentives to achieve conservation of riparian habitat, focusing on the Inner River Zone. Since landowners in the Inner River Zone are subject to frequent flooding, as well as erosion and/or sediment deposition, purchase of fee title or easement for habitat is a win-win situation, protecting fish and wildlife and allowing landowners to escape constantly battling the river. However, participation is only voluntary, you do not have to take advantage of opportunities to sell or any other incentive. For those who do participate, whether landowners, conservationists, Counties, State and Federal agencies, all have agreed to coordinate their activities with each other within set guidelines described in a Handbook. The Handbook also outlines a planning process that assures each nearby landowner, agency, and interested party a voice in the development of a project or activity that may be proposed within that river reach. With the SRCA functioning as envisioned, the planning of activities along the river will include all those interested, and result in more acceptable projects that fit the needs for both economic and environmental growth and harmony. The use of your land will not be affected unless you want it to. Lastly, it is envisioned that the improved ability for threatened species to flourish may allow**

activities such as the construction and maintenance of flood control and irrigation facilities to proceed with streamlined permitting.

**Q.** How many land acquisition or restoration projects has the Sacramento River Conservation Area done?

**A.** None—The SRCA has not acquired or restored any property. While the SRCA has the ability to receive funding for acquisitions or projects for such things as restoration, conservation easements or non-structural flood damage reduction projects, it has not applied for such funds. The SRCA Board has focused on coordinating planning efforts along the river, working with agencies, local jurisdictions, and landowners to provide assurances that projects have a positive effect for owners and neighbors. The acquisitions and restoration that have occurred along the Sacramento River are driven by other programs (CVPIA, CALFED, and the Sacramento River Refuge), and the SRCA Handbook provides principles and guidelines to help plan for these activities. These programs were in place before the SRCA was formed and are authorized to acquire more land in the area. Signatories of the SRCA Memorandum of Understanding have agreed to coordinate all projects within the Conservation Area with all interested parties.

**Q.** What are the Inner River Zone Guidelines?

**A.** The Inner River Zone Guidelines define the area along the Sacramento River described in the Handbook as an area of managed, or limited, meander. It's definition varies within each of the 4 Reaches, but is consistent in the concept that it provides room for the channel movement necessary to attain the goal of the program, "to preserve remaining riparian habitat and reestablish a continuous riparian ecosystem along the River between Redding and Chico, and reestablish riparian vegetation along the river from Chico to Verona". The IRZ Guidelines refer to an area of recent river movement and frequent flooding within the project levees. These lands usually have mixed soil types, erode easily and because of these reasons, are marginal economic farming units.

The Inner River Zone Guidelines have also been developed to provide more certainty to landowners as to where restoration activities would occur. Through the site-specific planning process outlined in the Handbook, land management issues that may affect neighbors are addressed before projects begin. Studies and permits must be completed before any activities occur within the floodways and flood flow capacities cannot be negatively impacted. Voluntary participation is assured through the Sacramento River Conservation Area, and if all landowners chose to participate, a total of about 35-40,000 acres would fall within the IRZ in all seven counties.

The Conservation Area includes the Inner River Zone, and the land outside the IRZ is also considered eligible for habitat restoration, but is considered important for it's agricultural value to the economy of the area. "Ownership of property in the Conservation Area will not result in any regulation or taxation to the landowner---it merely makes landowners eligible to participate in voluntary programs." (Handbook, pg. 1-6)

**Q What are the benefits to local residents of the Sacramento River Conservation Area?**

**A** The SRCA Board is made up of twenty-one members, fifteen of which are voting. Fourteen of the fifteen voting members represent landowners and public interests within the seven counties. This organization gives counties and landowners a very strong voice in activities along the River. Because the SRCA is not a governmental agency, it does not have the ability to direct or regulate activities. However, because of the commitment by both State and Federal agencies to coordinate their activities through the SRCA, **local issues are heard and addressed at a much higher level.** The six non-voting members of the SRCA Board represent the state and federal interests along the River and provide both information of their activities and insight to their agency of local issues and concerns.

The SRCA also provides a local voice in planning and coordinating activities along the Sacramento River. Through the Memorandum of Agreement, public agencies have committed to work with local government and landowners through a mutually agreed upon set of principles and guidelines outlined in the 1989 Plan and Handbook. Signatories of the MOA agree to plan overall management activities and coordinate specific projects through the SRCA. By coordinating planning efforts with all affected parties, habitat restoration, flood control, and local concerns are addressed as the project plan is developed. The SRCA has formed a "Landowners Assurances Committee" to develop a process to address a "Safe Harbor" policy. **The goal of this committee will be to work on reducing or eliminating negative impacts to neighboring landowners by adjacent activities.**

Long-term, **endangered species improvement should mean less regulatory restrictions on normal flood control and agricultural activities.** By allowing the natural river processes to occur within the Inner River Zone, improvement of conditions for many species may prevent the listing, or possibly provide the de-listing, of some endangered or threatened species within the area. Through the MOA, a permanent program to streamline the permit process has been agreed to by the signatories.

Overall, **the Sacramento River Conservation Area provides the opportunity for local residents to be heard and their concerns addressed, much more so than in the past.**

➤ **Frequently Asked Questions:**

**Q** Why has there been a dramatic increase in both sediment and debris in the River recently?

**A** Debris and sediment occur in the River episodically. Most of the time there is very little sediment and debris moving at all. The general rule is that 95 percent of the sediment and debris move only during 5 percent of the time. Between 1986 and 1993, California suffered through the worst drought in history. During this time, many riparian trees died and forest fires ravaged many of the tributary watersheds. Because there were no floods, the debris built up. This changed dramatically when a series of flood years between 1994 and 1998 swept accumulated debris from the tributaries and into the river. At the same time, the high flows increased bank erosion, which also resulted in a large increase in debris.

▪ by Koll Buer, Department of Water Resources, Geologic Investigations Unit.

**November, 2001**

**Q** Has the increase in riparian restoration in the last two decades contributed to the amount of debris in the River?

**A** This is a difficult question. Studies are under way to help answer this concern. First, it should be remembered that riparian forests are an effective filter, capturing both sediment and debris on point bars and on the floodplain, and dramatically reducing the sediment and debris in the river, particularly during the large floods when most debris is moving. Riparian forests and restoration projects only contribute to the debris along eroding banks.

Riparian restoration activities have been accelerating; however, most of the riparian restoration projects are young, with small trees and little biomass per acre. Riparian forests have the most biomass, and hence produce the most debris per acre eroded. One would naturally expect that the debris contribution of eroding restoration areas will increase in the future. Orchards have intermediate volumes of biomass. Debris in the river is increased by the practice of placing orchard clippings along eroding banks.

DWR is measuring eroding banks between Red Bluff and Colusa. Banks are being classified as agricultural, restoration, or natural riparian. Using biomass estimates and bank erosion rates, the study will determine the relative sediment and debris contributions of these three land use types. The study should also answer whether riparian restoration activities have a net positive or negative effect on the debris problems.

- By Koll Buer, Department of Water Resources, Geologic Investigations Unit

**December, 2001**

**Q** Why is the Conservation Area much broader than the present day riparian corridor, or the area within the inner river zone?

**A** There are a variety of reasons but the primary focus was to provide as broad an area as practical where landowners would be eligible to participate in conservation programs, and issues and concerns associated with riparian restoration along the river would be addressed. It also defines the area where land management practices outside of the riparian corridor might affect the success of the restoration effort. The 100-year floodplain became the starting point for delineation in each of the four reaches. Because the width of the present day floodplain is substantially reduced post-Shasta Dam, an effort was made to incorporate remnants of valley oak forest and oxbow lakes (artifacts of a pre-Shasta Dam hydrology) outside of the 100-year flood line. The reaches containing project levees were especially problematic. From the landowners' perspective, listed species that would be attracted to the habitat between the levees were not necessarily going to stay put. Farmers wanted assurances that the enforcement of laws designed to protect endangered species would not infringe their ability to farm. A variety of issues spilled out from within the levees –the need for good neighbor policies, the ability to participate in set-aside or compensation programs, concerns regarding public trespass, and seepage onto adjoining lands, etc. From the wildlife management perspective, preservation and connectivity to the habitat outside of the levees was important. There was also a recognition that agriculture was a far better neighbor than were other types of potential development, and it was therefore in the interest of a successful restoration effort to support conservation of adjacent agricultural lands and especially agricultural practices that were compatible with maintaining a viable riparian corridor. After months of discussion between those who would expand the Conservation Area many miles beyond the existing levees and those

who would limit planning activities to the area solely between the levees, a compromise was struck. It was determined that a one-mile buffer, but only including lands actually suitable for restoration, outside of the existing levees would provide a limited, but adequate area to address all reasonable concerns.

**February, 2002**

**Q Why is the Conservation Area much broader than the present day riparian corridor, or the area within the inner river zone?**

**A There are a variety of reasons but the** primary focus was to provide as broad an area as practical where landowners would be eligible to participate in conservation programs, and issues and concerns associated with riparian restoration along the river would be addressed. It also defines the area where land management practices outside of the riparian corridor might affect the success of the restoration effort. The 100-year floodplain became the starting point for delineation in each of the four reaches. Because the width of the present day floodplain is substantially reduced post-Shasta Dam, an effort was made to incorporate remnants of valley oak forest and oxbow lakes (artifacts of a pre-Shasta Dam hydrology) outside of the 100-year flood line. The reaches containing project levees were especially problematic. From the landowners' perspective, listed species that would be attracted to the habitat between the levees were not necessarily going to stay put. Farmers wanted assurances that the enforcement of laws designed to protect endangered species would not infringe their ability to farm. A variety of issues spilled out from within the levees –the need for good neighbor policies, the ability to participate in set-aside or compensation programs, concerns regarding public trespass, and seepage onto adjoining lands, etc. From the wildlife management perspective, preservation and connectivity to the habitat outside of the levees was important. There was also a recognition that agriculture was a far better neighbor than were other types of potential development, and it was therefore in the interest of a successful restoration effort to support conservation of adjacent agricultural lands and especially agricultural practices that were compatible with maintaining a viable riparian corridor. After months of discussion between those who would expand the Conservation Area many miles beyond the existing levees and those who would limit planning activities to the area solely between the levees, a compromise was struck. It was determined that a one-mile buffer, but only including lands actually suitable for restoration, outside of the existing levees would provide a limited, but adequate area to address all reasonable concerns.

**March, 2002**

**Q Are the lands along the Sacramento River accessible to the public for recreational activities?**

**A** This is one of those “It depends” questions. The Sacramento River Conservation Area is in the process of mapping ownership of lands along the River so those that want to recreate will know where they can. Property lines are difficult to identify, and ownership changes every so often, so if you are in doubt, contact nearby landowners or managers to make sure. The SRCA is also developing a strategy to improve access and facilities for recreation and other public use.

Most of the gravel bars that are obviously within the normal fluctuation of water levels can be accessed from the river for brief activities, however, if it is private land, permission from the landowner is best to avoid conflict. There are also public lands that may not allow public use: Lands that have been set

aside for sensitive species habitat; Newer acquisitions that have not had a Management Plan developed; Or, easement lands where public access was not purchased.

State and Federal agencies have different rules by which they must abide regarding public access after land is acquired. Generally, DFG land is immediately open to the public, but may have other restrictions, such as the possession of firearms in a game refuge. USF&WS lands usually are closed until management uses are determined. Be involved in that public process to voice your desires. Access across private property to public land is also unlawful, unless permission is given.

While there are many locations along the river where public use is welcome, even encouraged, be sure to plan ahead, contact local landowners and make sure that the area you want to enjoy is available for your use, then be sure to leave it in better shape than when you came.